

E 185
.6
.J679





**“The
Black
Man’s
Burden.”**

By H. T. Johnson, D.D., Ph.D.,

Phil. Pa.

1899

(Author by request.)

E 195
.6
J377

The bequest of
Daniel Murray,
Washington, D. C.
1925.



N. T. Johnson, D. D., Ph D

INTRODUCTION.

THE "Black Man's Burden" was delivered at my request to a large and appreciative audience on the closing evening of my Nova Scotia Conference, in Halifax, August 21, 1899. For an hour the rapt attention of the intelligent audience, punctuated with frequent outbursts of applause, was a sufficient testimonial to Dr. Johnson's mastery of the subject, and the occasion. The action of the audience in requesting its publication, after an unanimous vote of thanks to the lecturer, bespeak more for the value of the lecture than any word I may further add.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "W. R. Daniels". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "W" and "D".

One of the Bishops A. M. E. Church.

PREFACE.

THE appearance of this lecture in its present form is due to the unanimous action of the audience in Halifax, Nova Scotia, before whom it was first delivered. By rising, unanimous vote it was *Resolved* That the lecturer be tendered an expression of gratitude and approbation for his able, instructive, and valuable address on "The Black Man's Burden." In view of its wholesome truths and practical data, touching the history, achievements and prospects of the colored people of America, it was a united request that the lecture be published and placed within the reach of thousands who could not be present to hear it.

PILE ON THE BLACK MAN'S BURDEN.

Pile on the Black Man's Burden,
'Tis nearest at your door,
Why heed long bleeding Cuba
Or dark Hawai's shore;
Halt ye your fearless armies
Which menace feeble folks,
Who fight with clubs and arrows
And brook your rifles' smoke.

Pile on the Black Man's burden,
His wail with laughter drown,
You've sealed the Red Man's problem
And now deal with the Brown.
In vain you seek to end it
With bullet, blood or death,
Better by far defend it
With honor's holy breath.

Pile on the Black Man's Burden,
His back is broad though sore,
What though the weight oppress him,
He's borne the like before,
Your Jim-crow laws and customs,
And fiendish midnight deed,
Though winked at by the nation
Will some day trouble breed.

Pile on the Black Man's Burden,
At length 'twill heaven pierce,
Then on you or your children
Will reign God's judgments fierce;
Your battleships and armies
May weaker ones appall,
But God Almighty's justice
They'll not disturb at all,

By H. T. JOHNSON.

“The Black Man’s Burden.”

[Delivered in Halifax, N. S. Aug. 21, 1899.]

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

IN SELECTING “The Black Man’s Burden” as our topic, let it be understood that it is not our purpose to don the mantle of a crape prophet or assume the role of a philosopher of disenchantment. The crabbed critics of other races, and the calamity howlers of our own who constantly gloat over our misfortunes as a people, and who tell us that our condition is the result of an irreversible decree from heaven, seem not to know that “there’s a divinity which shapes the end” of races and individuals alike, and that the law of natural selection or that of the survival of the fittest operate no less among the various race-members of the human family than in the various departments of the mineral, vegetable and animal realms. The classic injunction “Know thyself,” so current among the Greeks, was no less incumbent upon the individual than upon the national or racial unit which represent a larger scope of endeavor and possibilities both as relates to form and content as well. The raw material of intellectual and moral endowment embodied in intelligent humanity represent a range of possibilities extend-

ing from savage sentiency to the exalted status of heaven-crowned characters a little lower than the angels. That the child is father of the man is a universal truism, but not more so than that the baby or inferior race of to-day may become the full-grown and superior people of to-morrow. There is no royal road to greatness in the life of any man and the same rule holds good in the case of all nations and race-varieties that have made any headway from the earliest recorded time to the present. If every man is the architect of his own fortune, every race is the maker of its own destiny. As a general thing those world-favored mortals who enter into ready-made fortunes and who have no burden to carry but that of pursuing lives of expensive pleasure, either become hopeless bankrupts in health, or possessions, or soon find themselves exhausted drones in the great hive of human activity. The race basking in the splendor of its career has less to stimulate it to higher exertion than its humbler and perhaps despised neighbor race, who, though beginning in obscurity and encountering adversity at every step, from the stimulus of its own peculiar endowments and the incentive furnished by the enviable standard set by its boastful and dominant pioneer, may yet eclipse its proud record by more lustrous achievements and a more towering grandeur. It is no more true that "every dog will have its day" than that every race has had its day or will have its day. If the Red man has flourished and pioneered the world, if the Yellow Man has played his part in the drama of

nations, if the white man shakes the world beneath the tread of his masterly sway to-day, it stands to reason that the Black Man's inning is next in order and that his will be a winning game should he play well and truly his part. Let no race or individual of any race feel that the golden highway of excellence or pre-eminence is closed against him because of birth, habitat or environment, or because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude; for

To all, the prize is open,
But he alone will take it,
Who says with Roman firmness
I'll find a way or make it.

The object of this lecture will be to consider the Black Man's Burden in a few of the shapes it has taken, not that we may magnify or gloat over them, but that under God we may see in them ministering angels to our advancement, and stepping-stones to higher blessings within our reach as a people. I shall first consider the subject in its historic setting, and note the teaching of the past with reference to the Black Man's Burden. The subject is susceptible of universal discussion, for the Black Man has a burden wherever you find him; but on this occasion we shall consider it in the light of his origin, career and destiny on the American continent.

It is remarkable to note that while others sought to rid themselves of the burdens which fettered them in distant lands by seeking the asylum of this newly-found country, the Black Man came only to find the yoke of

oppression and weight of bondage more firmly riveted upon him. The Pilgrims who brought their Bibles with them, in the hope of enjoying in New England that religious liberty which they did not enjoy in the Mother Country, in their blind devotion to their own welfare failed to recognize in the less fortunate subjects of adversity, the same inherent love of justice, the same fondness for freedom in any form. In the introduction of slavery in the virgin country, by the Christians who fled from the lash of civil and religious persecution in England, the Church was dealt a blow and given a setback which has made it lame for centuries, and which will send it limping through ages to come. Men like Garrison and Phillips, of anti-slavery fame, were not skeptics or atheists because they spurned connection with a church whose chief corner-stone was the dogma that slavery was a divine institution, or who, if it did not believe it was right to barter in human flesh, yet signally failed to lift up its voice like a trumpet against the monstrous wrong.

With the form, character and contents of American slavery you are too familiar for me to dwell upon its harrowing and barbarous details. Perhaps you shrink from its ghostlike recollection with such intolerance that you would have its ghastly skeleton buried beyond resurrection forever. The echo of its driver's lash and bloodhound bays, the shrieks of broken-hearted mothers parted by the auctioneer's block from ties dearer than life and stronger than death, you would have hushed

and cast into the sea of everlasting forgetfulness. Yea, you would have these and all the infernal relics of that creation of the lower pit killed from the consciousness of memory and buried, face downward—as the enthusiastic brother prayed that the Devil would be, so that the more he scratched the deeper he'd get. But why forget the fact and teachings of this dark and bloody chapter in the history of the race?

Turning from that dark chapter our eyes greet with gladness the dawn of that era of freedom described by the muse-inspired writer when:

The African catches a gleam of light
From his lair of a thousand years of night;
And the long lost signet shines once more
On his swarthy brow as in days of yore,
And the red blood sweeps through his knotted veins
As he strides a man from his broken chains;
Let none suppose that human clay
Makes human night or human day,
Or that God had his glorious hand defiled
When he molded the form of his dusky child.
No outside standard by his is applied,
The standard of man is the standard inside.
And all that he in his might has made,
Blend together in beautiful light and shade,
While the spirit it is and not the skin
That makes the whole human race akin
And in his loving and fatherly sight
His children are neither black nor white.

While we would not recall the sad experiences of the burden of slavery to gloat over them, let us thank

heaven that the night of that dark calamity is long overpast, that the mountains of that burden have been rolled away, and that we have advanced the journey of a generation upon the golden highway to race manhood and future grandeur.

BURDEN OF MORAL SHORTCOMINGS.

As wretched as was the black man's condition, as to outward possessions, when he left the house of bondage, his moral condition was far more appalling. That he should have nothing and be nobody, was only to be expected as a result of that degrading experience which fettered his limbs and tended to brutalize his nature for ages. Those who indict the race for an exaggerated degree of moral defectiveness seem altogether too indifferent to the facts of history and the verdict of logic touching the case. In the light of the hideous examples set, and the lessons taught him when he was told that his body belonged to his master, and that he had no soul, so far from being merely defective in his ethical make-up, the wonder is that he is in any wise less than a moral monstrosity, a hopeless leper in character. There was not a commandment that slavery did not wantonly break or teach the slave to violate. The first injunction of the decalogue forbade idolatry and enjoined worship of the true and living God. The slave master taught that his will was sovereign, made his servants call him master and yield willing obedience to his every whim and decree. The law from Mt. Sinai required observance of the Sabbath. It was a common

thing for the cotton, the rice, the cane and tobacco fields controlled by slavery to be under the sway of labor on the Lord's day. The institution or sacrament of matrimony was an inseparable plank in the Mosaic statutes and was ordained of heaven. The bond of holy wedlock was not a part of the creed of slavery, since its chief concernment was the fruitfulness of the slave and the profit resulting from his labors. From a system which practically denied the mandates of a sovereign moral ruler, that broke the Sabbath, that ignored the fourth commandment and treated the seventh commandment with universal contempt, there could be but little expected in the way of moral outcome.

THE BURDEN OF POVERTY.

In his escape from the house of bondage, the first obstacle which confronted the Black Man in his march to the highway of manhood was the burden of widespread poverty. The nation that he enriched by centuries of self-sacrificing servitude and helped to perpetuate by his blood in every foreign and domestic struggle, only mocked his destitution in promissory notes by which he was to be entitled to forty fabulous acres and some mythical mule. Whatever might have been the fond hopes he cherished to the national aid or the smile of fortune to cheer him toward freedom's height in any way, he soon undeceived himself and realized the fact he was to be the maker of his own fortune and the carver of his own destiny. Having been accustomed to dependence upon his owner for where he slept, and for what he ate and wore, it was thought that he would not know how to use his freedom, and that he would soon die from idleness and hunger. This ill prophecy was of course ventured long before he was credited with the sagacity that might lead him to gratify his appetite from some neighboring storehouse or some inviting poultry roost. In estimating that there would not be enough poor-houses to hold his kind, the

crape prophet of the Black Man seemed to have entirely overlooked the fact their subject is peculiarly a creature of providence and can survive almost any conceivable condition. They did not know that there was a side to the slave's experience altogether excluded from the view of those outside. The case of Uncle Remus is a fit illustration of the truth in point.

The story of our evolution as a race from a state of beggary three decades ago to that of our present material welfare carries with it the charms of romance and the interest of sure-footed history as well. Think of it! Aside from the few thousands which stood to the credit of the race by its free members throughout the country, thirty years ago we were but little better off in earthly possession than the proverbial "Job's turkey."

The census of 1890 gives striking evidence of the improved condition of our people in the South. In 1890 there were 12,960,152 homes and farms in the United States, and of this number 1,186,174 are occupied by pure blacks and 221,592 by mulattoes. Of the Negroes 207,616 own their homes or farms and 978,558 rent them. Of the mulattoes 56,671 own and 167,923 rent. The percentage of mortgaged property owned by Negroes is only 10.71, while the percentage of mortgaged property for the whole country is 38.97. Of the property held by Negroes 88.58 per cent. is owned without incumbrance.

In the North Atlantic States there are 5,808 homes and farms owned by Negroes free from mortgage, and

3,921 that are mortgage; in the South Atlantic States there are 107,084 homes and farms owned by Negroes free from incumbrance, and 8,032 that are mortgaged; in the North Central States there are 20,060 homes and farms owned by Negroes free from incumbrance, and 9,601 that are mortgaged; in the South Central States there are 100,591 homes and farms owned by Negroes free from incumbrance, and 7,608 that are mortgaged; in the Western States there are 1,204 homes and farms owned by free Negroes, and 298 that are mortgaged. In the whole country there are 234,747 homes and farms owned by Negroes free from incumbrance, and 29,541 that are mortgaged. In the South the percentage of home-owners is larger than in the North, and the proportion of these owners on farms of their own is larger than that of those who have homes in cities and villages.

Among the eleven million Negroes of the United States and Territories, there is real estate and property owned to the following amounts according to the census of 1890 :

Alabama.....	9,200,125
Oregon.....	85,000
Connecticut.....	500,155
Delaware.....	1,200,179
North Dakota.....	76,459
Florida.....	7,900,040
Utah.....	75,000
Iowa.....	2,500,372
Chicago alone...	2,500,000
Indiana.....	4,004,113
Kentucky.....	5,900,000
Maine.....	175,211
Missouri.....	6,600,340
Minnesota.....	1,100,236

Montana	120,000
New York	17,400,756
North Carolina.....	11,010,652
Nevada	250,000
Arkansas	8,108,315
California.....	4,006,209
Colorado.....	3,100,472
District of Columbia.....	5,300,033
South Dakota.....	175,225
Georgia.....	10,415,330
Indian Territory.....	600,000
Illinois	8,300,511
Kansas	3,900,222
Louisiana.....	18,100,528
Mississippi	13,400,213
Maryland.....	9,900,735
Michigan.....	4,800,000
New Jersey.....	3,300,185
New Hampshire.....	300,125
New Mexico.....	200,000
Nebraska.....	2,500,000
Massachusetts	9,004,122
Rhode Island.....	3,400,000
South Carolina.....	12,000,000
Tennessee	10,400,211
West Virginia.....	5,608,721
Virginia.....	4,900,000
Ohio	7,900,325
Pennsylvania.....	15,300,648
Texas	18,010,545
Vermont	1,100,371
Washington.....	575,000
Wyoming	231,115

The total amount of church property owned by Negroes in the United States is \$16,310,441. The total amount of property owned by them is \$263,000,000.

THE BURDEN OF ILLITERACY.

However weighty or numerous the other burdens slavery may have entailed upon the Black Man, the burden of intellectual blindness was the most grievous of all. There was but one direction in which his manhood was allowed to develope and assert itself, and that was in the direction of animal vigor and robustness. He was schooled in a system which placed stress upon the development of the muscle to the total neglect of the mind and its possible evolution. A good workman, a good fighter, a tower of herculean strength he was encouraged to be, but a man of ideas, *never!* If he were a giant in body, the more covetable a prize was he on the auction-block in proportion as he betrayed himself to be only a pigmy in mind. Let him be able to fell a mule with his fist or lift an ox on his shoulder and his master would place great stress upon his excellence and prowess. Not so if he were known to own a book, or could master the alphabet. In either case he was a worthless dangerous chattel and was legally deserving of being physically dismembered or of being sold out of harm's way to some more rigid region of enslavement. Under such conditions, is it any wonder that freedom's dawn should find the Black Man an in-

intellectual dwarf, a child as to mind, though a man in bodily organization.

No wonder that he should have been caricatured as he winked his eyes to the light of knowledge for the first time. They saw him entering the hall of learning with shuffling gait fresh from the haunts of ignorance. His clumsy movements they said suggested the presence of an elephant in a crockery shop. As he pored over the problems given in his arithmetic, his critics laughed, ha! ha!! ha!!! They said his skull was so thick that it would be difficult for a tenpenny nail to dent it, much less for it to grapple with a "rule of three," or conduct its subject across the labyrinthian stages of a *pons assinorum*. They were willing to occupy common grounds of judgment with Ariel and Calhoun and say that the Black Man had no soul or intellect and that they would believe it when he was known to extract a square root in mathematics, or accurately pursue a Mi verb in all its hide and seek movements of Greek inflection. Crossing the Rubicon of his own inexperience and scaling the Alps of his critics' prejudice and ill prophecies, the Black Man grappled manfully with the burden of intellectual blindness and the result is by no means to be laughed at. Let us note a few facts in connection with the consideration before us:

In less than the first five years after emancipation, the illiteracy of the race was reduced to the extent that one-tenth of our people ten years of age and over could read and write. In 1870, or five years after emancipa-

tion, the records of the census show that only 20 per cent. of us ten years and over could read and write. Ten years later, or 1880, the population had increased to 30 per cent. In 1890, only a generation after emancipation, forty-three out of every one hundred colored persons ten years of age and over were able to read and write. These figures show our rapid progress in the acquisition of elementary education.

When we remember that in the three decades since freedom the colored race has reduced its illiteracy 35 per cent., only the most sanguine hopes need be indulged as to the ability of the Black Man to bear his intellectual burden in the future. Those who doubt the ability of the race to take in the higher branches of learning or who insist that Negro education should be restricted to the elementary or industrial channel would do well to remember that there are 160 institutions of the race devoted to advanced learning; that 38,000 Negro youths are in these institutions, and that 28,000 Negro instructors are in charge of the mental and moral training of these youths.

Our career and accomplishments in the republic of letters also score greatly to our credit in the direction of meeting the educational demands upon us. The Negro author is no longer a rarity, for our bookmakers are almost as periodical as the days, and are as good, bad or indifferent as the capacity or caprice of their writers may elect to decree. Whether in the realm of the classics as a Scarborough, or in the world of romance and poetry as

a Dunbar, the genius of the Negro as an investigator or entertainer ranks high and measures up to the standard of universal endorsement.

Forty years ago had any one prophesied that the race would control an institution in a state whose Governor would stand side by side with the leading Negro of the age, and be crowded with literary honors by that institution, that prophet would have been taken for a madman; and yet, such an unlikely occurrence has passed into history, and Wilberforce not only records the Governor of Ohio, but the President of the United States in the person of Wm. McKinley, as among its most honored alumni.

BURDEN OF RACE PREJUDICE.

It would be well for us to allow charity to begin at home in the matter of considering the obstacles which retard our more rapid advancement. No one will doubt the wrong, the injustice, the inhumanities we suffer from others, but it were well for us to turn our eyes within our own ranks, and detect the presence of traitors who undermine and damage our stronghold more than the multitudinous adversaries seen and unseen that are without. There are many such internal foes, but there is one gigantic enemy which we would do well to arrest and expel as soon as possible.

Race prejudice is the monstrous bane which ever retards our elevation, but it might be well to remember that race prejudice of black men against black men is just as heinous, and far more fatal than race prejudice of white men against black men. Some of you will, doubtless, be startled when I tell you that we keep our own selves down by this prejudice more than others are able to keep us down. Whether you believe it or not, the fact remains, and is confirmed by illustrations and demonstrations without number. You may say that our lack of faith in each other, our habit of opposing the welfare of one another, or of viewing our brother's prosperity with an envious eye, is due to our ignorance or

the false teaching of centuries. I care not whether you impute the shortcomings to slavery, to lack of race pride, to a failure to realize its disastrous results upon our present prosperity, or upon our posterity unborn, I want to warn the race that until we rid ourselves of this sinking iniquity of race prejudice against ourselves, there can be no permanent progress for us in this land, nor in any other under the broad dome of the starry heavens anywhere. Whether this spirit is considered in the many who seem happy in obstructing the pathway of those who endeavor to rise, or in the purse-proud color-phobia tendency of the few who enjoy the smiles of fortune, the danger is none the less serious to our future welfare as a people.





NOV 72

N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 011 643 815 A

